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The Battle of Newmarket, Virginia,

May 15, 1864.

By Col. H. A. du Pont

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PREFACE

It would seem that the publication at this time of a pamphlet dealing with the battle of Newmarket, Va., May 15, 1864, is not inappropriate, as the recital supplements much that has been already printed in regard to that engagement.

The main facts of this account were committed to writing many years ago but, at the request of my children, the narrative has been recently revised and somewhat extended. This will sufficiently explain a number of personal references which would be out of place in a strictly historical work.

Winterthur, Delaware,
May 15, 1923.

H. A. du Pont.

Footnote References

- O. R.—The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.
- L. 34.—Life with the Thirty-fourth Massachusetts Infantry, by Col. Wm. S. Lincoln.
- N.M.C.—The Newmarket Campaign, by Prof. Edward Raymond Turner.
- M.S.I.—Journal of the Military Service Institution, Nov.-Dec. 1912.
- B.L.—Battles and Leaders of the Civil War.
- F.A.J.—Field Artillery Journal, Nov.-Dec. 1922.
- L.W.V.—Loyal West Virginia, by Maj. Theodore F. Lang.

THE BATTLE OF NEWMARKET

On the 29th of February, 1864, Brig. Gen. B. F. Kelley, U. S. Volunteers, commanding the Department of West Virginia, was superseded by Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, U. S. Volunteers, who reached the headquarters at Cumberland, Maryland, on the 10th of March and at once took charge. General Sigel, then in his thirty-ninth year, was a native of Germany and in his youth had been a lieutenant in the Baden army which he left to embark in unsuccessful revolutionary movements. In consequence, he had been forced to abandon his native land in 1849, and after three years mainly spent in Switzerland and England, came to the United States in 1852, some nine years before the beginning of our Civil War. Entering the service as a colonel, he was quickly appointed a brigadier and then a major-general of volunteers. After serving in Missouri, he led a force which in 1862 fruitlessly pursued Stonewall Jackson in the Valley of Virginia and later in the same year became a corps commander under Pope where his sluggish movements and constant disregard of instructions brought him into very great discredit with those in high command.

On the 17th of May, two days after the battle of Newmarket, General Halleck wrote as follows to General Grant: "I have sent the substance of your despatch to General Sigel. Instead of advancing on Staunton he is already in full retreat on Strasburg. If you expect anything from him you will be mistaken. He will do nothing but run. He never did anything

else." ¹ Halleck, as it would seem, did not mean to impeach Sigel's personal courage, but referred to his incapacity as a commander which had always led to the enemy's getting the advantage and compelling him to beat a hasty retreat.

Notwithstanding Sigel's most unsatisfactory record, Secretary Stanton, no doubt on account of political considerations, selected him for the independent and highly important command of the Department of West Virginia. The disastrous results of this unwise choice probably led the Secretary to refer his selection of Sigel's successor to General Grant, who, May 19th, promptly telegraphed General Halleck as follows: "By all means I would say appoint Hunter, or anybody else, to the command of West Virginia." ² As might have been anticipated, Sigel's attitude was largely that of a foreigner and he was always keenly alive to the interest of his fellow-Germans which he sought to promote by every means in his power.

Upon taking charge of the Department of West Virginia he issued orders reorganizing the infantry and cavalry into brigades and divisions, the 1st Infantry Division, to which my battery belonged, consisting of two brigades under the respective commands of Colonels Moor, 28th Ohio, and Thoburn, 1st W. Va. Volunteers, each brigade being composed of four regiments of volunteer infantry. The artillery destined for field service was assigned as follows: Du Pont's Light Battery B, 5th U. S. Artillery, Carlin's Light Battery D, 1st W. Va. Volunteer Artillery, and Snow's Light Battery B, 1st Md. Volunteer Artillery

¹ O. R., Vol. XXXVI, Part II, p. 840.

² O. R., Vol. XXXVI, Part I, p. 492.

(each having six 3-inch rifled guns), to the 1st Infantry Division under Brig. Gen. J. C. Sullivan, U. S. Volunteers, to which also belonged Von Kleiser's consolidated 30th and 32d N. Y. Volunteer Light Batteries (six Napoleon guns), a German organization, while Ewing's Horse Battery G, 1st W. Va. Volunteer Artillery (four 3-inch rifled guns), under Lieutenant Morton, formed part of the 1st Cavalry Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Julius Stahel, U. S. Volunteers, another foreigner. Sigel made no provision for a chief of artillery nor for any separate organization of that arm, thus throwing away the advantages of proper selection of position, concentration of fire and general "ensemble" of operations which so greatly enhance artillery efficiency. He also appointed General Stahel chief of his staff without relieving him from the command of the 1st Cavalry Division, a step which had the practical effect of giving Stahel full control likewise of the infantry division under Sullivan, the only other general officer with the troops in the field, consisting of one infantry and one cavalry division.

General Grant had decided that Crook was to move from the Kanawha and that all available troops in the Department of West Virginia were to concentrate at Beverly, W. Va., from which point they were to march southward under General E. O. C. Ord and unite with Crook, the objective being the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad, an important Confederate line of communication. The movement under Ord was abandoned, however, as the roads were impassable, and Sigel was directed to take command of these troops and move up the Valley to effect a junction with Crook at Staunton or some point in its vicinity.

Very early in April, Light Battery B, 5th Artillery, was sent by rail to Webster, W. Va., and from that place moved to Grafton, four miles away, for the purpose of taking part in the Ord expedition, but when this was abandoned, the battery, on the 21st, returned to Martinsburg. A week later it marched with the rest of Sullivan's division to Bunker Hill, a small village on the Valley turnpike about ten miles from Martinsburg. From that point it moved to Winchester which was reached on the 1st of May, whence, after a delay of some ten days, it marched at 6:00 A. M. on the 11th to Woodstock where our advance guard first came in contact with the enemy.

Although he did not know the country, Colonel Augustus Moor of the 28th Ohio Volunteers, commanding the 1st Infantry Brigade and a capable officer, was ordered on the 14th to make a reconnoissance in force to feel the enemy and ascertain the position and strength of the Confederate troops under Imboden, who was reported to be at Rude's Hill on the other side of the Shenandoah, a movement which led to the battle of Newmarket on the following day.

As two Ohio regiments of Moor's brigade were on escort duty with the train, he was not strong enough to make the reconnoissance with the remainder of his command. Such being the case, the usual and ordinary procedure would have been to send the other brigade under Colonel Thoburn, a very competent man, who knew the ground well and later commanded a division of Crook's corps at the battles of Winchester and Fisher's Hill, as well as of Cedar Creek where he was killed. This did not, however, accord with the views of General Sigel, who insisted that the reconnoissance

should be commanded by Moor who was a fellow-German, and to make up for the latter's deficiency in numbers, he took away two of Thoburn's regiments and ordered them to report to Moor. This breaking up of brigades gave rise to much confusion at the opening of the conflict, and Moor himself stated in his report that it was a great mistake not to have let him take the regiments of his own brigade.¹

In discussing this battle, an account will be given of the part taken by Light Battery B, 5th U. S. Artillery, from the time it went into action between 2:30 and 3:00 P. M., until the close of the engagement, but as the other details of the conflict have been very accurately described by Turner,² Colonna,³ and others, they will not be repeated here further than to say that Sigel's line of battle, in its final position, was about a mile north of Newmarket at right angles to the turnpike, with his right flank resting on the Shenandoah River and his left on Smith's Creek. His troops, from right to left, were disposed as follows: Snow's and Carlin's batteries on the extreme right and, next to them, Thoburn's infantry brigade with the 34th Mass. Volunteers in touch with the batteries, and on its left the 1st W. Va. and the 54th Penna. Volunteers in the order named, with the 12th W. Va. Volunteers in second line and for the support of the two artillery units. Next came the two regiments of Moor's brigade, 123d Ohio and 18th Conn. Volunteers, then Von Kleiser's battery with Stahel's cavalry on its left and extending

¹ L. 34, p. 289.

² N. M. C.

³ M. S. I.

to the creek, Ewing's horse battery being on the extreme left.

The battle of Newmarket was fought on Sunday, May 15, 1864, and resulted in Sigel's complete defeat with casualties of 650 in killed and wounded and 185 prisoners, a total of 835. He also lost five pieces of artillery, one abandoned by Von Kleiser's battery after an ineffectual effort had been made to carry it off the field swung under a limber, while the other four were taken by the enemy, as they could not be withdrawn after the horses had been shot down. With the exception of a few infantry units which retained their formation as they fell back, as well as of a portion of the artillery, the Union forces fled precipitately and in the greatest possible disorder until they reached Rude's Hill some four miles to the rear, where, after great exertions, Generals Sigel, Stahel and Sullivan rallied them behind the two Ohio regiments which had not taken part in the battle. From Rude's Hill the beaten army withdrew to the north bank of the Shenandoah but no attempt was made to take position there, though the ground was defensible, and the retreat was continued for another mile across Mill Creek, a tributary of the Shenandoah close to Mount Jackson, where, as Sigel stated, "we were perfectly safe, as the creek was high and could not be forded."¹ Notwithstanding this assertion he was evidently very nervous, as he ordered a further retreat, beginning at 9:00 P. M., and after an all-night march his troops reached Edinburg about 7:00 A. M. on the 16th, from which point they continued their retrograde movement after a short halt, arriving at Strasburg about 5:00 P. M., and early on the morning

¹ B. L., Vol. IV, p. 490.

of the 17th took a strong position north of Cedar Creek, which was "easily defensible against very large odds,"¹ my battery of course accompanying the rest of the division.

In his brief official report to the Adjutant-General of the Army made the day after the battle, Sigel described the flight of his troops as a gradual retirement from the battlefield,² but in his subsequent account written for the "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War," he admitted that "there was some confusion and scattering of our retreating forces." All the same, however, the complete demoralization of most of his command not only came under my personal observation but was confirmed by one of his German compatriots, Colonel Moor, commanding the 1st Brigade of the Infantry Division. The official report of this officer stated that two of his regiments which did not take part in the battle (the 28th and 116th Ohio Volunteers) joined him about 4:00 P. M. after being compelled to fix bayonets in order to clear their way on the turnpike through the "disgraceful fleeing masses of cavalry and straggling infantry."

As a usual thing, highly conflicting statements have been made in regard to the numbers on each side actually taking part in the various engagements of the Civil War, and the battle of Newmarket was no exception to this rule. Sigel stated in his official report that the enemy's infantry alone was 7000 strong—which, with about 1100 or 1200 cavalry and artillery (Turner's figures as given in his "Newmarket Campaign") would make the whole Confederate force about 8150

¹ Letter from Col. du Pont to his father, dated May 17, 1864.

² O. R., Vol. XXXVII, Part I, p. 76.

men. In Sigel's account, however, as published in "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War,"¹ this total is reduced to "7000 men or thereabouts," but, on the other hand, Turner puts the strength of the Confederate troops engaged at 4500 men and those of Sigel at 6000,² the last figure being no doubt based upon the actual strength of the Federal regiments as shown by the official returns. It is evident, however, that due allowance was not made for the large detachments required for the protection of the Union signal stations and of the very heavy train, which included 200 wagons of supplies for Crook's column in addition to the necessary transportation for Sigel's own command.

We may observe that the situation was radically different with respect to the lines of communication of the contending forces. While the Confederates had nothing to fear, those of the Union armies were in constant danger of attack from Mosby's partisan troops which were ready at all times to sally forth from some secure position in the mountains bordering the Valley; and in this particular instance, Colonel Mosby has expressly stated in his report that he had sent "two detachments under Captains Richards and Chapman to embarrass Sigel as much as possible."

It can be clearly shown by the official reports that Turner's figure of 6000 Federals actually participating in the battle is much too high. We have seen that there were two brigades of four regiments each in Sullivan's infantry division—a total of eight regiments, two of which, as is not disputed, were not in the battle, leaving six regiments that actually fought. Inasmuch as three

¹ B. L., Vol. IV, p. 488.

² N. M. C., pp. 114 and 111.

companies of the 18th Conn. Volunteers were detached as a guard to the Union signal station, "somewhat less than 350"¹ men of that regiment were in the battle, while in the 54th Penna. Volunteers the number of "officers and men in the engagement was 566."² In the 34th Mass. Volunteers, "the detachment of one company" (as skirmishers) "with other details left about 450 muskets in line,"³ or about 50 men to each of the nine remaining companies. Allowing 50 muskets and two musicians to the detached company and adding the two officers who are known to have been with it, we have a total of 54 which, with 450 muskets reported by Colonel Wells, makes 504 men; and increasing this figure by the sergeant-major, two color bearers and 18 company musicians, together with the 25 officers reported by name as having been present, we have a total of 550 officers and men. This makes an aggregate of 1466 men for the three units just mentioned, comprising one-half of the Federal infantry, and it is safe to say that the number of those belonging to the three remaining units which took part in the conflict was not more (and in all likelihood less) than 1698 men, or 566 for each unit, making a grand total of 3164 infantry. Further, Turner puts the Union cavalry at 1000 men (which coincides with the number given in the "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War") and the Union artillery at 300, and if we accept these figures we have an aggregate of only 4464 instead of 6000. Turner's estimated strength of the Federal artillery, however, is too low, as it can be readily computed

¹ O. R., Vol. XXXVII, Part I, p. 82.

² O. R., Vol. XXXVII, Part I, p. 87.

³ Ibid., p. 85.

that nearly 350 artillerists presumably took part in the fighting, instead of 300, and counting the 50 in excess it will be seen that the strength of the opposing forces was about equal. In view of the very liberal estimates made of the strength of the three Union infantry regiments concerning which we have no details, there seems to be a reasonable probability that the number of Southern combatants may have slightly exceeded those of the North, which, if correct, is all the worse for Sigel's generalship, as it shows the extent of his failure to concentrate his whole command which exceeded that of Breckinridge by at least 1000 or 1500 men.

At 5:00 A. M. on Sunday morning (May 15th), Sullivan's division, of which my battery formed a part, began its movement on the turnpike towards Mount Jackson (arriving there about 10:00 A. M.), crossed the Shenandoah and continued its march southward. About 11:00 A. M. we heard some cannonading towards the front, to which not much attention was paid, as it was generally known that a reconnoissance in force was being made. Extraordinary as it may seem, General Sullivan evidently had not been informed of the impending battle, as our march was not hastened and before noon, when we were not far from Newmarket, he ordered a half-hour's halt to give the men time to eat their rations.

The weather was extremely hot and sultry, with intermittent showers, and my battery horses, white with lather, seemed so thirsty that, as soon as the halt was ordered, I asked and received General Sullivan's personal permission to unhitch and send them, in charge of an officer, to drink at a little stream, commonly

known in Virginia as a "branch," some four or five hundred yards to the west of the turnpike. While the horses were drinking, an order came from General Sigel to send him two batteries as rapidly as possible, upon which Sullivan immediately ordered forward Carlin's and Von Kleiser's batteries, at the same time informing me that the regular battery would have been one of those sent had not its horses been unhitched. A few minutes later, when the battery was in complete readiness, a second order arrived directing Sullivan to move at once with his infantry, but to my extreme surprise and disappointment, he interpreted this order literally and, as my battery was not specifically mentioned, ordered it to remain where it was, but said that he would send for it as soon as he reached the front, which he failed to do. Sigel claims¹ to have sent orders to Sullivan through Captains McEntee and Putnam of his staff "to bring forward all his troops without delay," but this statement is obviously not correct.

Later very heavy firing was heard indicating that the engagement was in progress, but still no orders were received and I became excessively uneasy fearing that my command would not get into action. Finally, after a delay which seemed endless, the order came, when the battery instantly moved to the front at a sharp gallop, arriving on the battlefield between 2:30 and 3:00 P. M.

As we drew near the scene of conflict, I directed the caissons to draw out of the column and go into park at a suitable distance in rear under the command of

¹ B. L., Vol. IV, p. 489.

Quartermaster-Sergeant Robert Sauthoff. Pushing forward then with my six pieces the whole Federal line was found to be retreating in the greatest disorder, save a few regiments to the west of the turnpike which were keeping up their formation as they fell back.¹ On the east side of that highway, the Union forces were in total rout and making for the rear in the wildest confusion—infantry and cavalry mingled with what was left of Von Kleiser's battery which had become completely disorganized after being very badly mauled by the fire of ten Confederate 3-inch rifled guns under McLaughlin.

No general officer was in sight, but I was at once pounced upon by a number of young and inexperienced staff officers who proceeded to give me (upon their own initiative but in the names of Generals Sigel or Stahel) the most absurd and contradictory orders with respect to putting the battery in position. In speaking of the youth of most of these officers, it occurs to me that I myself was not twenty-six at the time, but common sense, reinforced by eight years of continuous military instruction and military discipline, made it easy to reach an instant decision as to what ought to be done, and, although under fire for the first time in my life, I then and there made up my mind to ignore the conflicting instructions and to take such measures as seemed right and proper. In brief, I was compelled to act, and did act, upon my own judgment and of course assumed all responsibility. This was the last that was seen of the staff officers in question, who evidently went promptly to the rear with the rest of Sigel's forces, and

¹ Among them the 54th Penna. and 34th Mass. Volunteer Infantry.

from that time forward until shortly before 9:00 o'clock at night, when the division marched from Woodstock, I had to depend entirely upon myself and did not receive a single order, either directly or indirectly, from any military superior!

The battery was in the open and entirely without support, but the curtain of smoke which hung over the field prevented the Confederates from discovering this fact, and it seemed necessary to risk the loss of some of my guns in order to cover and protect the retreat of the Union troops. The leading platoon (two guns) under Second Lieutenant Charles Holman, was at once put in position close to the turnpike and on its right, or west side, and instantly opened fire. Taking advantage of this, I ordered the other four pieces to the rear, and riding back, put the center platoon, under First Sergeant S. D. Southworth, in position some 500 or 600 yards farther to the rear and in immediate proximity to the east side of the turnpike, with orders to open fire as soon as he was unmasked by Holman. Indicating a slight swell of the ground some 500 or 600 yards still farther to the rear, I also instructed Second Lieutenant B. F. Nash, commanding the left platoon, to go into position at that point. These dispositions, known in the tactics of that day as "retiring by echelon of platoons," consumed but a very few moments, when I galloped back to the front and remained with Lieutenant Holman's pieces which continued to fire with great rapidity and precision until we found ourselves entirely alone, with not a single Federal soldier in sight save the members of our own battery. Telling Holman that we had "to get out of this" and ordering him to go back at a gallop and take the best position he could find

some 500 or 600 yards behind Nash's platoon, I joined Southworth, a most promising and handsome young soldier who five months later (as an officer) fell at the battle of Cedar Creek. With the utmost coolness and accuracy, he opened on the enemy as soon as Holman's platoon had passed and kept up a rapid fire until his own platoon was in its turn left entirely isolated, when he received orders similar to those already given to Holman. I then joined the left platoon under Nash, who opened promptly in his turn and continued to fire until he fell back by my direction, when Holman began firing for the second time. My recollection is that neither Southworth nor Nash opened again, as the enemy had apparently discontinued his advance, though we were still under Confederate artillery fire.

In his official report, Colonel Moor has stated that he formed some troops on the turnpike to the right and left of a battery, which was evidently either Snow's or Carlin's, as both of these units were in retreat. Light Battery B, 5th U. S. Artillery, however, did not come in contact with any infantry command and was entirely without support throughout the whole battle.

In order to be in the best possible position for defence, had the Confederates resumed their advance, the caissons were directed to precede us on the turnpike and the formation of echelon by platoons was maintained until we reached about sundown (7:05 P. M.) the bridge over the Shenandoah, which we found absolutely deserted. To my extreme surprise no rear guard had been left at that point after the bulk of the Union troops had crossed, nor was any officer of General Sigel's staff on hand to take cognizance of the situation and report to him in regard to the withdrawal of the

whole command to the north bank of the Shenandoah.

In view of the precipitate retreat and demoralization of our troops, it seemed wise to take steps to prevent the enemy from passing over the river during the night, and though there were no orders in regard to the bridge, I took the responsibility of partially destroying it, but never received subsequently either commendation or criticism of the action taken. The pieces, caissons and forge passed to the other side, but the battery wagon was retained and Quartermaster-Sergeant Sauthoff, with the artificers of the battery, assisted by some cannoneers, proceeded to take the tools which the wagon carried and tear up the bridge floor preparatory to setting it on fire.

While this was going on, a troop of volunteer cavalry remained in close column to the east of the bridge, but too far away for oral communication, and when a bugler was sent to notify the officer in command (name and regiment then unknown) that it was necessary to cross the river immediately, as we were about to destroy the bridge, he complied with an apparent reluctance which was hard to understand at the time and passed within a few feet of me without uttering a single word. The incident had almost passed from my memory, when, upon reading, some twenty years later, Sigel's paper on the battle of Newmarket,¹ the name of the officer was revealed as well as the probable cause of his displeasure. He evidently wanted his men to be the last Union soldiers to cross the bridge, and though my decision to destroy it unintentionally deprived him of that dubious honor, he received it all the same at the hands of General Sigel, who has stated in his account

¹ Sigel in the Shenandoah Valley, B. L., Vol. IV, p. 487.

that "Captain Battersby's company was the last to cross the bridge."¹ As the planking was removed and then set on fire under my immediate supervision, it fell to my lot to be the last person to cross; but no special credit was involved, as we were not under fire and the enemy had wholly discontinued his pursuit.

The services rendered by Light Battery B, 5th Artillery, in the Newmarket battle are not mentioned in the official records: if General Sullivan made any reports, there is no trace of their existence, while those made by Sigel shortly after the engagement were very brief and did not go into details. In the very full account, however, entitled "Sigel in the Shenandoah Valley," which the latter wrote some years subsequently for the "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War," his only mention of the artillery unit under my command was as follows: "The Du Pont Battery took position behind the right of Thoburn's brigade as a reserve." This statement is absolutely untrue, as the battery was not in that part of the field at all, but at a point on the Valley turnpike about a mile and a half from the battlefield, where General Sullivan, to the very keen disappointment of its officers and men, had personally ordered it to remain until further instructions. Except as just stated, Sigel's narrative does not make any reference whatever to the battery and he is absolutely silent in regard to the part it played in covering the retreat of the Union forces—an omission not apparently due to any personal ill will, but the result rather of his habitual carelessness and lack of information in

¹ Sigel in the Shenandoah Valley, B. L., Vol. IV, p. 490.

regard to the details of his command. My recital of the conduct of Light Battery B, 5th Artillery, in the Newmarket battle is, therefore, not only a contribution to the history of the campaign but an act of justice to the personnel of the unit in question; and as the account is fully confirmed by the statements of others, it would seem that Sigel's omission to further refer to the battery cannot detract from the weight to be accorded to my testimony.

Although the battle of Newmarket was of comparatively little importance, either with respect to the numbers engaged or the results attained, it was an episode of our Civil War which has always aroused special interest in Virginia, largely due to the fact that the youthful cadets of the Virginia Military Institute had participated so valiantly in that engagement. As time went on, various features of the conflict were frequently discussed by those who had fought on the Confederate side. Incidentally, the part taken by the unit under my command in covering the retreat of the Union forces was fully recognized, and ample and complete justice was finally accorded to the regular battery in an article on the battle of Newmarket which appeared some ten years ago in the "Journal of the Military Service Institution," the author having participated in the fighting on the Southern side as cadet captain of Company D of the Virginia Military Institute battalion.¹ Later, Turner, in his history of the Newmarket campaign, has stated that the battery "did excellent service, firing into the enemy and with-

¹ The Battle of Newmarket, by B. A. Colonna, in M. S. I.

drawing slowly by platoons;"¹ and lastly, Col. J. C. Wise, in a most appreciative article entitled "Field Artillery in Rear Guard Action,"² has given a detailed account of the part taken by my battery in the battle of Newmarket as an illustration of his subject. Both of the magazine articles, however, which are perhaps too laudatory in their tone, entirely corroborate my narrative, and the first named paper, by Benjamin A. Colonna, has exceptional weight as coming from the pen of an eye-witness.

Although the effectiveness of its fire could not be verified on account of the thick smoke which shrouded the battlefield, it was always my conviction that the battery had done good work, but Colonna's article revealed the fact that I had "builded better than I knew." His statement is as follows: "The enemy was now, say 2:45 P. M., retreating everywhere in great disorder, and our pursuit continued until about 3:00 P. M., when we found ourselves in front of Du Pont's Battery B, 5th Regular Artillery. The audacity of this Battery caused us to think that it had a strong infantry support and we paused to form line before advancing further. This caused a delay of fifteen or twenty minutes and allowed the Thirty-fourth Mass., the Twelfth W. Va. and the Fifty-fourth Pa., and perhaps some other troops, time enough to slip through to freedom."³

The events which took place on the Union side during the twenty-four hours preceding the battle are of special interest, because they not only determined the

¹ N. M. C., p. 93.

² F. A. J., p. 502.

³ M. S. I., pp. 346-347.

precise location of the conflict but the approximate moment when the fighting was to begin. As previously stated, late in the day, on the 14th, Sigel had ordered a reconnoissance in force under Colonel Moor to procure all the information possible in regard to the strength and disposition of the enemy's forces. General Imboden, the Confederate commander, fell back upon Moor's advance, whereupon the latter crossed the Shenandoah and pushed on as far as Newmarket, twenty miles south of Woodstock, which he held at dark, having learned positively that Breckinridge with his reenforcements had joined Imboden—which information was in the possession of the Federal commander late that night, as he himself admitted.¹

Having ascertained what he wanted to know, Sigel should have promptly ordered Moor to fall back on Mount Jackson (seven miles distant) where all the Union troops could have been more readily concentrated; but instead of doing this, he left the comparatively small force under Moor to face the entire Confederate army until he could personally reconnoiter the terrain and decide whether he should "meet the enemy's attack"² near Newmarket or at Mount Jackson.

Sigel, as it would seem, did not reach the front until about 10:00 A. M. on the morning of the battle, and "with his staff and bodyguard came on the ground with a flourish," as related by Major T. F. Lang, of the

¹ B. L., Vol. IV, p. 488.

² B. L., Vol. IV, p. 488.

6th W. Va. Cavalry (temporarily on Sigel's staff).¹ Had not two or three hours' delay been gained by the skilful maneuvering of the Union troops in the early morning, which led the enemy to believe that the whole Federal army had arrived, Moor's comparatively small force would have been driven back and probably very roughly handled by the advance of Breckinridge's entire command. As matters turned out, the Confederate delay was to their advantage, for otherwise Sigel would have been unable to make a stand south of Mount Jackson and his troops, of necessity, would have been more concentrated.

Having succeeded, however, in making his examination of the ground, Sigel decided to risk a battle near Newmarket and the prime factors which prompted this resolution, according to his own statement, were the strategic importance of that place and the discouragement which would be caused by the withdrawal of the troops under Moor who had reported that his position was very good.² As a further reason, Sigel claimed that Lang had asserted that the troops were "eager for the fight,"³ although the last named makes no mention of it in his book.

To any professional soldier, the grounds upon which Sigel based his decision to fight at Newmarket, would seem entirely inadequate, and it goes without saying that instead of devoting so much time and thought to reconnoitering the terrain and considering the strategical aspects of the case, he should have given his close attention to the concentration of his troops and

¹ L. W. V., p. 114.

² B. L., Vol. IV, p. 488.

³ Ibid.

to seeing that they were in proper condition upon going into action and not physically exhausted and suffering from hunger, as was the case with some of the Union infantry regiments in the Newmarket battle.¹

The causes of Sigel's defeat are not difficult to determine. It is a fundamental precept of the military art, as Jomini has long since pointed out, that a good commander "maneuvers in such a way as to engage the mass of his own force with fractions of the hostile army." Breckinridge acted on this principle while Sigel seems to have had no conception of its existence. At 5:00 A. M. on the morning of the battle, Breckinridge's troops were well in hand and massed a little south of Newmarket, while at the very same hour, Sullivan's division, comprising the main body of the Union infantry with eighteen pieces of artillery, was just beginning its march from Woodstock, twenty miles away, leaving behind (on train escort duty) two regiments, constituting one-half of its 1st brigade. These units were not relieved and ordered to the front until 8:00 A. M.,² too late to take part in the fight, which did not prevent Sigel, however, from stating that he had "no doubt that the battle would have ended differently if the two regiments, which I had good reason to believe were near, had arrived in time to assist us."³

In addition to the confusion heretofore mentioned incident to the temporary breaking up of the infantry brigades when the reconnoissance in force was ordered,

¹ O. R., Vol. XXXVII, Part I, p. 81.

² O. R., Vol. XXXVII, Part I, p. 80.

³ B. L., Vol. IV, p. 490.

Sigel made a further and much more serious error in regard to the disposition of his artillery, a matter which has not been very thoroughly discussed in the various accounts of the battle.

As before stated, the Federal artillery consisted of Du Pont's, Carlin's and Snow's batteries, each having six 3-inch rifled pieces—of Von Kleiser's battery of six Napoleon guns, and lastly, of Ewing's Horse battery (four 3-inch rifled guns) commanded by Lieutenant Morton and posted on the extreme left of the Federal line with the cavalry under Stahel.

The key of the Federal position was the high ground on its right where Snow's 3-inch rifled battery was very properly placed, and the reports show that Carlin's and Von Kleiser's batteries, as they reached the field, were assigned to their positions by General Sigel in person. He made, however, the very grave blunder of placing Carlin, with rifled guns like Snow's, immediately on the last named's left, and Von Kleiser, with the six Napoleon guns of his German battery, in apparently the more prominent and important position on a slight elevation near the turnpike in the center of the line, entirely overlooking the fact, however, that the German battery, on account of the shorter range of its pieces, could not effectively return the fire of the Confederate 3-inch rifled guns. Had Von Kleiser been placed next to Snow on the Union right, when the Confederates assaulted that flank the canister fire from his Napoleon guns, by reason of their larger calibre, would have been much more effective than that from Carlin's rifled pieces; and if Du Pont's and Carlin's batteries had been in the position occupied by Von Kleiser, they could have easily held their own

against McLaughlin's ten guns, and the result would in all probability have been very different, so far as the artillery was concerned, and might perhaps have turned the scale in favor of the Federal forces.

In "The Positions and Movements of the Troops in the Battle of Newmarket," by Col. G. H. Smith, the author states¹ that portions of Carlin's battery took part in the reconnoissance in force under Moor, which is a mistake. Carlin's entire battery, to my personal knowledge, marched with the division from Woodstock at 5:00 A. M. on the 15th and only entered the battle when sent forward by General Sullivan as previously related.

Although on the turnpike and about fifteen minutes from the battlefield, Du Pont's Regular Battery was prevented by positive orders from taking part in the fight until after 2:30 P. M., when the Union forces were just giving way. The six guns of this battery comprised more than one-fifth of the Union artillery, but Sigel, as he personally put the batteries in position, does not appear to have noticed its absence, although he ought to have known the number of guns under his command.

In default of a chief of artillery, the mounted batteries all seem to have rendered good service and to have accomplished as much as could have been possibly expected where complete unity of effort was not attainable, and the Confederate reports stated that the individual action of these batteries was highly efficient. It is to be noted that the Horse Battery was not able to take a prominent part in the battle, as when Stahel's cavalry was disastrously routed after an abortive

¹ pp. 21 and 22.

charge, the battery was forced to fall back also, and Colonna tells us that it accompanied Stahel who moved along the westerly bank of Smith's Creek with a small cavalry force watching Imboden's movements on the other side of that stream.¹

The Confederate artillery consisted of eighteen pieces, four of which belonged to Imboden's cavalry and cut but very little figure in the engagement; but ten of the remaining pieces, under the immediate command of Major McLaughlin, chief of artillery, all being 3-inch rifled guns which outclassed Von Kleiser's shorter range Napoleons, were concentrated upon his battery and did great execution, dismounting one of his pieces and inflicting many casualties.

In addition to Sigel's many shortcomings, both in strategy and grand tactics, the military administration of his command was very far from working smoothly and efficiently. His spectacular appearances on horseback surrounded by a brilliant but largely incompetent staff and followed by a cavalry escort, did not succeed, as he had apparently hoped would be the case, in inspiring the confidence and good will of those under his command. The general feeling at the time seems to have been largely reflected in the following brief extract from a personal letter written by a Union officer two days after the battle: "I had anticipated something of the kind all along" (Sigel's defeat) "as everything has been very badly mismanaged, in my

¹ The Battle of Newmarket, by B. A. Colonna, in M. S. I., p. 348.

opinion,"¹ a sentiment which Lang has thus fully confirmed: "The writer has never forgotten the absolute mismanagement of the splendid body of veteran soldiers that composed Sigel's army."²

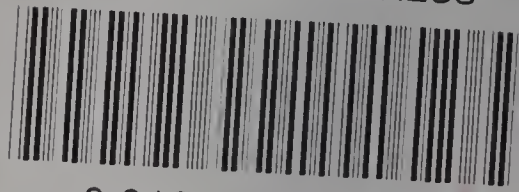
So manifest was the incompetence displayed by Sigel during his brief direction of military affairs in the Valley of Virginia that the Secretary of War apparently felt obliged to relieve him. On the 19th of May, four days after the battle of Newmarket, Maj. Gen. David Hunter, U. S. Volunteers, was assigned to the command of the Department of West Virginia, and he arrived at Strasburg on the 21st and took over the command, his predecessor, at the request of the Washington authorities,³ remaining in the department under his orders—no doubt a tribute to Sigel's popularity among his fellow-Germans throughout the United States.

¹ Letter of May 17, 1864, from Col. du Pont to his father.

² Personal Recollections of the Battle of Newmarket, by Maj. T. F. Lang.

³ O. R., Vol. XXXVII, Part II, p. 340.

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